AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

The following listing of claims supersedes all prior versions and listings of claims in this application:

1-12. (Cancelled)

13. (New) A method of communicating information between two or more devices within a distributed environment, the method comprising:

each device receiving example XML files from each other device with which it is to share information representative of the data which each other party intends to send to the respective device;

utilizing these received example XML files, in combination with one or more example XML files representative of the data which the respective device intends to send to the other parties, to generate a validator file which is operable to validate all of the example XML files; and

using the validator files to validate received or transmitted XML files communicated between the devices and having a structure conformant with any one or more of the example XML files.

14. (New) A method according to claim 13 in which information is communicated among three or more devices.

15. (New) A method according to claim 13, wherein the step of generating a validator file comprises:

parsing one of the example XML files to generate a tree structured file comprising a root node and one or more subsidiary nodes each of which corresponds to an element within the XML file and has zero or more associated child and attribute lists which contain the names of zero or more children nodes and zero or more attributes respectively;

parsing any additional ones of the example XML files to generate corresponding additional tree structured files;

traversing each tree structured file to generate an intermediate structure comprising groups of nodes in which, each time a node is encountered which does not have the same name as any previously encountered node, a new group is created in the intermediate structure and one or more details of the node in question are stored in the group, and each time a node is encountered which does have the same name as any

previously encountered node its child and attribute lists are compared with those of the or

each previously encountered node having the same name and if there is a match, no

further entry is made in the group, but if there is a mismatch, then a new entry comprising

one or more details of the node is made within the same group as the previously

encountered node of the same name; and

generating the validator file based upon the intermediate structure.

16. (New) A method according to claim 15, wherein each tree structure is a

Document Object Model (DOM) tree.

17. (New) A method according to claim 15, wherein the validator file is a

Document Type Definition, DTD, file or an XML schema definition file.

18. (New) A method according to claim 15, wherein the intermediate structure

and the groups forming the intermediate structure are Java objects, and wherein the

details of a node stored in a group are a reference to a Java object representing the node

in one of the one or more tree structured files.

1430197

19. (New) A method according to claim 13, further including automatically processing any received XML file upon successful validation by the validator file.

20. (New) A system for communicating information between two or more devices within a distributed environment, each device comprising:

receiving means for receiving example XML files from each other device with which it is to share information representative of the data which each other party intends to send to the respective device; and

processor means for utilizing these received example XML files, in combination with one or more example XML files representative of the data which the respective device intends to send to the other parties, to generate a validator file which is operable to validate all of the example XML files, and using the validator files to validate received or transmitted XML files communicated between the devices and having a structure conformant to any one or more of the example XML files.

21. (New) A system according to claim 20, comprising three or more devices operable to communicate information between themselves.

1430197

22. (New) A system according to claim 20, wherein each processor means is further operable to:

parse an example XML file, the XML file having a structure which the validator file to be generated should cause to be validated, to generate a tree structured file comprising a root node and one or more subsidiary nodes each of which corresponds to an element within the example XML file and has an associated child and attribute list which contain the names of zero or more children nodes and zero or more attributes respectively;

acquiring and parsing any additional example XML files to generate corresponding additional tree structured files;

traversing each tree structured file to generate an intermediate structure comprising groups of nodes in which, each time a node is encountered which does not have the same name as any previously encountered node, a new group is created in the intermediate structure and one or more details of the node in question are stored in the group, and each time a node is encountered which does have the same name as any previously encountered node its child and attribute lists are compared with those of the or each previously encountered node having the same name and if there is a match, no further entry is made in the group, but if there is a mismatch, then a new entry comprising

1430197

one or more details of the node is made within the same group as the previously

encountered node of the same name; and

    generating the validator file based upon the intermediate structure.

    23. (New) A computer-readable storage medium containing a computer program

or suite of computer programs for causing a computer or computers to carry out the

method of claim 13 during execution.

1430197